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**‘Along Kingdom’s Highway’: The proliferation of Christianity, education,
and print amongst the Nagas in Northeast India**

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine the story of the American Baptists and how their mission activities in the Naga Hills District (1871-1955) have impacted upon present day politics in the Indian state of Nagaland. Baptists make up nearly 95% of the current Naga population in Nagaland. The paper will investigate the relationship between the Baptist mission’s philosophy on education, Christian conversion and the subsequent rise of a sense of ‘national community’ amongst the Nagas. Although the primary motivation for the American missionaries was to convert, the British administrators also thought that introducing Christianity would prevent influence on these tribes from Hindu and Muslim groups. Thus began Christianity’s part in a developing framework for resistance in this region, raising significant questions with regard to Christianity’s persistence as a form of political articulation in contemporary Nagaland. This political articulation, I suggest, is related to a greater sense of agency brought about by Christianity, and Missionary activities in the fields of education and print. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) were at the forefront of these changes.

Key words: Christianity, Nagas, American Baptists, education, English, nationalism.

Introduction

Very few comprehensive studies have been done on Northeast Christianity, particularly in comparison to other Indian Christianities during the colonial period (see for example, Randall & Cross 2007; Frykenberg 2003). Scholarly discussions that include Northeast India are more marginal still with regard to Christian mission and education (Bellenoit 2007; Kumar & Oesterheld 2007; Bhagavan 2003). In fact, with few exceptions (Dena 1988; Barpujari 1986; Downs 1983)¹, hardly any have examined seriously and systematically the highly significant role American Baptists played in this region of India, particularly with regard to the relationship between Christian conversion, mission philosophy on education, and the subsequent rise of a 'national community' amongst the different tribes in the region. This oversight is not such a mystery however. Although British colonial intervention occurred around 1840 (Misra 1998), in what we now know as 'Northeast India', parts of the region remained largely unadministered even up to the British departure in 1947. Due to this and other reasons, such as the rise of strong regional nationalisms amongst different ethnic groups like the Mizos, Assamese and Nagas, the region is still viewed as a recalcitrant periphery unable to integrate with the larger 'Indian' imagination. I suggest that Christianity to an extent is responsible for this defiance. The main aim of this article is to draw our attention to the work of the American Baptist missionaries in the Naga hills² over the period of 1871-1955, and to explore the ways in which this work has helped to shape Naga nationalism and the continuing Indo-Naga conflict in the post-colonial era. Based on extensive archival and field research, it shows how the missionaries, in their process for conversion, introduced educational infrastructure and print technologies which were influential in the formation of a strong and distinct nationalism.

The Naga hills is now the Indian state of Nagaland. Statehood was inaugurated on the 1st December 1963. The new state included parts of the unadministered areas of Tuensang District, previously Naga hills Tuensang Area. Nagaland is surrounded by the present state of Assam in the West, Myanmar (Burma) on the east, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam on the North and Manipur in the South. The American Baptist missionaries were reluctant interlocutors in the mission enterprise in this region, as their sights were clearly

directed towards China and Central Asia – home to an estimated 170 million potential converts. Northeast India was perceived as a gateway into this celestial field of harvest (Sharma 2003: 257). British administrators invited them into the Northeast for commercial reasons – to work with the tea garden labourers in Assam and to introduce Christianity to the ‘hill tribes’, but the Baptists saw this primarily as a gateway to their larger geo-religious expansion.

The proliferation of thousands of dialects and languages with no standardized *lingua franca* in the Northeast challenged these American missionaries. Although the American missionaries wanted primarily to convert the Nagas into Christians, the British administrators also thought that introducing Christianity would prevent influence on these tribes from Hindu and Muslim domination. Christianity, a British administrator in 1859 argued, would provide a ‘counterpoise to the vast non-Christian population of the plains’ (Laitham 1969: 103). The introduction of Christianity by the American Baptists under British colonial rule, as I will show, enabled Christianity to become a large part of the framework for resistance against the Indian state and Hindu hegemony. The latter were seen by the various Naga nationalists as having colluded since the 1940s to suppress the national movement for sovereignty (see Thomas 2016; Longkumer 2018). This paper will argue that the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) in the Naga hills (1872-1955), with their mission philosophy, provided foundations for Naga nationalism, which has emerged from a sense of agency brought about by Christianity, and activities by the Baptist churches in education and print. It is therefore necessary to start the story there.³

Educating the ‘natives’: a strategy of mission

According to the secretary of the ABFMS, John Skoglund, its formation was due, in large part, to the work of Adoniram (1788-1850) and Ann Judson (1789-1826), who went to India as Congregationalists. Convinced by William Carey of the Baptist position on conversion – to choose, as believers, to be baptised through immersion in water – they were baptised by Carey in India. Letters that they wrote home to organise American Baptist support, together

with the help of fellow missionary Luther Rice, brought about the creation of the ABFMS, though the exact date is unclear (Skoglund 1990: 26-27).

The ABFMS, who began work first in Assam in 1836, soon realised that the Brahmaputra valley, where Hinduism was already an established religion, would be hard to penetrate (Barpujari 1986). With only a handful of Assamese converts in 25 years of work, it was proving frustrating. The hills on the other hand - where 'animism' and 'demon worship' were rife - were seen as a better alternative (Clark 1907: 10). But working in the hills was still a challenge for the ABFMS, due to the scepticism of some British administrators in allowing missionaries into these regions. While some were wary, however, others, like the Chief Commissioner of Assam, David Scott (1826-31), and latterly Major Francis Jenkins (1834-61), suggested introducing Christian missions among the hill tribes of Assam.⁴

The two largest Christian denominations in the Northeast – the Welsh Presbyterians and the American Baptists – would grow primarily through the patronage of Scott and Jenkins. Aided by colonial administrators such as W.B. Bayley, they circumvented the official policy of religious neutrality adopted by the British government with regard to missionary work in the region by two means. The first was to change the missionaries' designations. So when Scott suggested employing 'missionaries' to W.B. Bayley, Secretary to the British Government, Bayley replied that paying them as 'school-masters' would be more appropriate (Chaube 1999: 54). The second was to emphasise the natives' 'lack of religion'. Religious neutrality was maintained because the tribals apparently had no religion to violate. For example, the British Political Agent in Manipur, James Johnston, notes that the Nagas had 'no religion; that they were highly intelligent and capable of receiving civilization; that with it they would want a religion, and that we might just as well give them our own' (2006 [1896]: 43). This idea predominantly began in the Enlightenment era when some evangelical Protestants placed undue emphasis on the rationality of Christianity and denied any salvific significance to 'animist traditions' and also, according to the mission historian, Brian Stanley, to many other religious traditions (Stanley 2001: 4; see also Chidester 1996; Downs 2010).

These Enlightenment-influenced ideas were in general agreement with 'New Divinity' – an American evangelical movement – which would have an impact on ABFMS strategies towards education.⁵ Although founded as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and focused on emotive aspects of Christianity, the evangelicals did not ignore the prominence of the mind and the cultivation of reason. In particular, they argued that reading the Bible was the agency through which the individual and society would be transformed. The human mind, thus, had to be shaped through an emphasis on education, which would 'eventually lead to the vindication of Christian truth' (Downs 2010: 50). Reflecting on the relationship between mission strategy and education in the Naga hills in 1945, the American missionary George W. Supplee poses a question – 'how do we reach men for Christ?' - to which he answers:

It means teaching, - teaching new Christians, older Christians, Christian leaders. It means school teaching, for we must have an educated Christian leadership. Most of our people are illiterate and schools are a most important part of our work. Non-Christian young people attend our schools and find Christ as their Savior. Our Christian schools must be the best, and the missionary is the adviser.⁶

Writing around forty years earlier, the ABFMS missionary S.A. Perrine (1894-1899) concluded in his 1905 conference report that through schools the Gospel reached the hills 'more rapidly and permanently than by any other means' (cited in Phillips 1984: 194).

The Society's strategy with regard to education had been articulated more fully in 1853 in a seminal document, *Report of the Committee on Schools*. Nathan Brown (1807-1886), who was a missionary in Maulmain (Burma) and later in Assam (India), was its chief author. Brown's report continued to have an impact on educational strategies right up until the 1950s. The report argued that schools should be established primarily for the 'training of future pastors and teachers' and that only Christians should be employed as teachers with Christian books and daily observance of religious services. Alongside school education for the converts, a strong emphasis was also placed on preparing native pastors for educating their churches so that a 'healthy, vigorous, stable Christianity' be established, empowering native Christians to become 'equal to...the missionaries themselves'. Finally, the document recommends the expediency of teaching

English. English, it suggests, would be immensely useful to enable native pastors and teachers to draw 'from our standard authors the weapons to serve them in any emergency' when the churches were left in the hands of the natives. Knowledge of English would also be useful in translation, 'for the purpose of transferring our most important books into the native tongues'. If such advice was not heeded, the Report warns of the dangers of inaccurate translation, without considering the idiomatic nature of local vernaculars, and affecting the development of a proper indigenous Christian literature.⁷

Similarly, C.E. Brudette, in making a recommendation to the Jubilee conference of Assam in 1886, says that the title 'teacher' would be more popularly accepted than the suspicious 'missionary'. In schools, he suggests, the missionary will have access to the 'minds of the heathen' to shape and mould, to 'disseminate knowledge' of 'eternal truth'. This process would manifest itself in the Northeast of India, and particularly in the Naga hills. The missions would persuade a non-Christian village to have a school. A trained Christian schoolmaster would establish the school, while also doing evangelical work. Once a Christian community was established, the schoolmaster would become the first pastor, also known popularly as 'Pastor-master' (Kiremwati 1995: 16). Although not the sole method, this rationale worked to such an extent that Christianity and education were viewed synonymously: amongst the Garo of Meghalaya, a child attending school would be registered as Christian even by his or her *Songsarek* (non-Christian) parent (Singh 1972: 593).

As noted earlier, this strategy was in line with 19th century evangelicals' emphasis on giving prominence to the mind and the cultivation of reason. Whereas older missionaries amongst the Nagas, like E.W. Clark and S.W. Rivenburg, were wary that the primary task of the missionary – that of evangelisation – would be offset by the tedium of running a school, the situation in the Naga hills demanded a particular strategy: (i) education as a means of reaching the mind of the 'natives' and shaping their worldview, and (ii) the need to pursue translating and teaching in the native vernacular. The missionaries' recognition that education would be a better method in shaping a person's worldview enabled Christianity to be embedded more effectively. Indeed, some 70 years later, the Naga nationalist leader A.Z. Phizo, while visiting Kütsapomi

village in Southern Nagaland in 1952 as part of the campaign for independence, emphasised three important ideas – becoming a Christian, education, and the right to sovereignty. The fact that Phizo explicitly linked these three concepts can, to some extent, be attributed to the seeds planted by the ABFMS (see image 1). This is a good example of the extent to which Christianity has become intertwined with the idea of a Naga nation.

Along Kingdom's Highway

In the Naga case it was Godhula Rufus Brown, an Assamese convert and evangelist, who first ventured into the Ao areas of the Naga hills. The British were not far behind in the Ao area, following the missionaries in 1889. It was in the Angami region of Kohima they set up their administrative headquarters in 1878, after a period of 'non-interference' since the first British contact with the Nagas in 1832 (Lotha 2007). In 1871, Godhula set off with a Naga companion from Sibsagar, to Amguri (present day Assam) tea garden. Still in Assam, he met other Naga tea workers and persuaded them to take him up to Dekha Haimong, an Ao Naga village. Suspicious that Godhula was either a spy or from 'the Company' (the British), the villagers asked him to leave. But he remained on the outskirts of the village where, according to Mary Clark's account, he sang hymns in Assamese of the 'sweet, old, old story' of Jesus (Clark 1907: 11).

It took considerable effort from Godhula to convince some villagers of Dekha Haimong to accept the Christian god. The presence of the ABFMS missionaries Edward and Mary Clark, however, who started work with Godhula in 1876, polarised the village. The Clarks were seen, by those opposing Christianity, as agents of 'The Company', whose whiteness made them complicit with the British authorities, perceived as a vast, encroaching power. Some threatened those who followed them with punishment and expulsion from the village. Conversion to Christianity was also slow due to the fact that it upset the daily rhythms of communal and ritual life, for example, declaring Sunday as a day of rest and requiring converts to observe this new diktat. Those in authority feared that the 'gospel of peace and love' would usurp the ancestral custom and values of the village (Clark 1907: 17). In 1876, the Clarks, along with a few Ao converts, left Dekha Haimong and established the first Christian village, Molung.

Although still largely marginalised, they started attracting families from the parent village and other villages because of the 'prosperity of the village' (Clark 1907: 91). In 1892, the chief of Dekha Haimong village was baptised (Eaton 1984: 9).

These activities were, however, tempered by the lack of missionary personnel on the ground, with only around four ABFMS missionaries in support. In Kohima a mission station was opened in 1880, but it was largely ineffective, and another station in Wokha was established in 1885 but closed down after two years. It was finally decided in 1894 to revitalise the Ao church and the mission by imposing stricter discipline, and excluding those whose 'lives were unworthy of the Gospel' (Lerrigo 1931: 606). This was the Christian covenant as espoused by two American missionaries, Revs. F.P. Haggard and S.A. Perrine. Within four established churches only 2 Christians would accept the new arrangement (ibid). In terms of statistics, this was indeed a debacle: after 23 years, it was said that only 2 church members remained (ibid)! This demonstrates not just a resistance to the work of Haggard and Perrine; the larger work of the ABFMS was also in question. The missionaries had to start thinking innovatively. Rather than focusing solely on individual salvation as a means to conversion, the missionaries were of the mind that enlightening the masses was a more fruitful approach. In the words of Clark, the chief instigator of this plan, 'if these wild Nagas were given proper education and if they accepted the Christian religion, they would become a great nation' (cited in Ao 1970: 14).

Educating the native

In February 1895, Clark established The Impur Mission Training School. In the expression of the eminent Naga scholar I. Ben Wati, 'in a new era of light and enlightenment, Impur became like a second *Longtrok* (genesis) for the Aos'. Impur was described by the Nagas as 'heaven', a place of pilgrimage where 'white missionaries were in good numbers' (Wati 2008: 215). At the entrance pilgrims would wash their 'face and feet at a sacred spot' (ibid). While the enthusiasm of Naga converts like Ben Wati displays a sympathetic view of the missionary cause, others were more cautious. According to the account of Longri Ao, who became a famous Naga evangelist, his father did not approve of him

attending school, as he was worried that it would 'incur the wrath of the irate spirits' (Rao 1986: 2). Impur would be a turning point for the ABFMS missionaries, who now realised the value of education as a means of engaging the Nagas (Downs 1983: 128). In the words of an ABFMS missionary, W.F. Dowd:

The Impur school is intended to give a primary education to as many boys and girls as possible and to fit them to go out as teachers and preachers...They study arithmetic, writing, spelling, psychology, hygiene, geography, and history; at the same time special attention is given to the study of the Scriptures and practical Christian work. The brighter pupils are taught English as soon as they can read their own language, and thus is opened to them the way for more advanced work in secular subjects as well as for the study of the entire Bible. (Dowd 1905: 19)

Eager to disseminate Christian literature and the translation of the Bible quickly, the Mission centres in Impur and Kohima reduced the different Naga languages to written forms using the Roman script, whilst also putting an emphasis on teaching English. It must be noted that the decision to create a written script using the Roman alphabet was purely practical, because the only script available for printing presses at the time was the Roman one. Furthermore, the invention of the typewriter made it possible for the missionaries to increase their literary production significantly. The adoption of the Roman script meant that indigenous languages that were initially used in the Northeast such as Hindi/Bengali/Assamese were abandoned in favour of this standardized form.⁸ Showing continuity with the *Report of the Committee on Schools* drafted in 1853, Clark wrote in 1893:

...the English alphabet with the Italian sound of the letters is the best we can give these hill tribes who have no alphabet of their own. Have schools in such villages as will help maintain them [sic]...Take the best out of these village schools and teach them English. Many of these English educated boys will become teachers and in their own language but they will be able to draw from the best of English sacred literature to enrich their discourses and educate their people. (Bendangyabang 2004: 100)⁹

The adoption of a unitary script gave rise to three significant ramifications. First, in order to translate the Bible into the vernacular it meant establishing village schools as the basic mechanism to teach and educate, but also to convert. Clark was of the opinion that without imparting Christian education, 'Christianity

cannot be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people' (cited in Ao 1995: 129). Here the trained Christian teacher was at the heart of this enterprise. Within three years, those in village schools would go to Impur or the Kohima Mission Training Schools where they would receive further education. Upon completion, they would either return to the villages as school teachers, or would go on to serve in the government.

What started as an effort to simplify linguistic diversity in the Naga hills for easy and standard consumption, eventually made literacy key to education and upward social mobility.¹⁰ The monopoly over education and the running of schools that the ABFMS established dominated the landscape to the extent that the British government sought closer collaboration and assistance. By 1923 the Mission ran 208 schools, serving around 5,438 pupils (Eaton 1984: 10-11). By 1913-14 most of the mission schools worked closely with the British government, although the actual running of the schools was left to the missionaries, subsidized by the government (Chaube 1999: 56). This cooperation is visible in the establishment of the Joint High School in Kohima in 1942. The government paid the salaries of the staff and teachers, and the missionary became the Headmaster. The Mission paid for the Bible teaching, Christian hostel supervision and for aid to Christian pupils. Such was the success of schools in Kohima that by 1947 George Supplee writes that many private Middle English and Upper Primary Schools were springing up. Most of these schools included a compulsory Bible class.¹¹

While the British discouraged any evangelising on the part of the ABFMS, they nevertheless required educated Nagas for the burgeoning administration of the Naga hills. This created a tension, as practically the only source of educated Nagas came from the ABFMS schools and teachers; thus by employing these Nagas in their various offices the British were also inadvertently enabling the process of evangelisation. In their 1923 Annual Report, the ABFMS noted with satisfaction that the government were only able to secure the services of Christians for vacant teaching position.¹² In addition, when the British mandated a six-day schedule for schools, the ABFMS established Sunday as a school day where students were required to attend church services to procure credit for regular school attendance (Eaton 1984: 11). The growth of education and

schools meant that the only recourse for an unevangelised village requesting teachers would be a Christian teacher who would subsequently establish a Sunday school and from that a church would grow. This strategy of church planting worked emphatically for the ABFMS, such that by 1937, according to the missionary Tanquist, education, school, and evangelism became the conventional model of Mission strategy (Eaton 1984: 12).

The second significant ramification of adopting a single script was that it resulted in the energetic activity of translating and producing texts in the vernacular, as outlined in the 1853 Baptist educational strategy. Between 1877-93 around 12 major translation works were undertaken and printed using Roman script, ranging from the Gospels to the Ao Naga grammar (Puthenpurackal 1984: 82). A translation of the Ao New Testament was finally completed in 1929, and the entire Bible in 1964; three thousand copies were sold within the hour it went on sale (Glancey 2011: 82). The Kohima station, for the Angami Nagas, followed a similar pattern to that of Impur. By 1925 most of the Angami New Testament had been written. In 1938, a magazine, *Kohima Mission School Paper*, appeared in Angami. This gradually increased from one page to 12 pages in 1939, with a subscriber list of more than 500 by 1947. The Kohima Mission also helped edit and print 500 copies of the monthly paper of the Naga National Council in 1947, alongside printing government textbooks.¹³

In the Lotha Naga areas of Nagaland, Rev. Bengt Ivan Anderson, along with some Lotha students, translated the New Testament in 1944, and a Bible School was established at Vankhosung Mission centre, a first of its kind in the Naga hills. The Sumi Naga station was the slowest, with its mission centre only established in Aizüto in 1937, and a Bible school in 1949 (Bendangyabang 2004: 94). The so-called 'border tribes' (in erstwhile unadministered areas of Assam), consisting of Chang, Kalyo-Kengyu (present day Khiamniungan), Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, and Yimchunger, were also supported through missionary work by the Ao and Sumi churches, aided financially, for example, by the sizeable Hunter Memorial Fund set up by the ABFMS around 1952.¹⁴

The third important factor resulting from the adoption of a common script, and consequently the common experience of education and the use of English (and Nagamese), was that mission education facilitated the opening up of

the region to more communication and inter-village/tribal solidarity amongst the different Nagas. Mission stations were established for various Naga groups – the Ao in Impur (1894), Angami in Kohima (1881), Lotha in Wokha (1885 and again in 1931/32), and Sema in Aizüto (1937) – where schools were founded, offering instruction in English; training programmes for teacher-pastors established; and groups were brought together to advise on the translation of the Bible, Christian teachings and hymns. This gradually centralised a system of education and missionising. All groups, whether Angami, Lotha or Ao, were focused not only on translations of the Bible but also on translating *in the Roman script*. These stations – particularly Impur and Kohima – became a congregating ground for members of different Naga tribes who were educated and then sent as teacher-pastors to villages outside their own areas, where they organised Christian communities and churches (Eaton 1984: 12), thus spreading the adoption of a common script through the use of the Bible. Missionary ventures were undertaken into the unadministered Naga areas of the Chang, Phom and Konyak from Impur; similarly, Kohima catered to the Chakhesang, Rengma, Pochury, and Zeliangrong, opening up these common spaces further. In the words of the ABFMS missionary, S.A. Perrine:

In our school the Bible is the text book with such other books that directly bear on the Bible. Our purpose is to help any tribe, that on going from this school to his own or another people, he can tell the old, old story (Clark 1907: 132).

Through these mission stations the ‘old, old story’ was not only told in the vernacular; the vernacular was also *told* in a new script, alongside Nagamese as a language of communication.

What about the Nagas’ own views on the educational activities of the ABFMS? Two instances are recalled by I. Ben Wati in his autobiography during his time at Impur in the 1920s. He says:

The walls of all the bedrooms were covered with newspapers from America or with pictures from magazines. The house was full of pictures of white people and America, because no one subscribed to newspapers from India. Ironically, the only newspaper in that jungle place Impur was the *New York Times*, which the white missionaries brought from their land. (Wati 2008: 80)

Reflecting on a geography lesson taught by an American teacher, Hattie, that the earth is like an orange, spherical and round, I. Ben Wati recalls:

...if we set out of Impur crossing all the hills and valleys, rivers and oceans, going on straight, then we would reach back to Impur again. I marvelled at being told this, and in order to know whether it was true or not, I wished to go round the world once. (Wati 2008: 187)

This passage reveals a certain cognitive release for indigenous Nagas like Ben Wati; education provided a broader imagination of belonging in a world not bound by the hill ranges of one's village, but a vast space that could be traversed even by village boys like him. Indeed, in early accounts, education is portrayed positively both in local and missionary accounts. For example, not only was education a guide to knowing the broader world beyond Impur or the Naga hills, it was also a way to navigate one's religious life-worlds and to forge a path towards heaven (Wati 2008: 187). Another famous evangelist, Longri Ao, was lured to the 'strange art of writing and reading' happening in these mission schools (Rao 1986: 2). A leading Ao Bible translator, Nokdemlemba, recalls how it was in a dream that he heard the voice of his sister telling him that education will reward him in later life (Thomas 2016: 48). Missionary narratives also present a similar story: for early Ao converts like Sosangnungla and Imonungshi, learning to read was associated with 'teaching' others about the Christian story.¹⁵ For others still, like the Angami convert Zhaaw, reading the Bible would help settle disputes between villages: 'I got the New Testament and read to them the words of our Lord about forgiving seventy times seven...' (Lerrigo 1931: 607). Reflecting on the impact of these mission schools upon the Nagas, the then Chief Minister of Nagaland, Hokishe Sema, in the Platinum Jubilee Celebration of Impur in 1970, said that the school:

lit a torch which enlightened the dark crags of Naga Hills and brought the rays of modern and new life to our hamlets and removed the grimness of social environment. It produced, leaders of thought and action, who brought a revolution to our isolated villages...It knitted us into a community and instilled a sense of pride and self-respect. (Souvenir 1970: 5)

Missions and print

With the adoption of the Roman script, English gradually became the medium of instruction, replacing Assamese.¹⁶ The introduction of English in itself enabled a 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1991). Beyond this, the fact that missionaries used the Roman script meant that through this script the Nagas were able to see their own vernacular in print and thus consolidate, I suggest, a view of themselves as a people (and potentially therefore as a nation). From my conversations with many older Nagas, there is at least a tendency to suggest that the syllogism - Christian conversion, education, and nationalism - was a vital centripetal force that fostered an 'imagined community' that brought together disparate tribes under two institutional centres: the school and the church.

While Anderson suggests that monolingualism can bring about a nation, and here we see how English helped in this, it might also be argued that in this case the impact of one script was also critical. The similarity in script - all in the Roman alphabet - enabled the Nagas to see similarities between their different tribes. The ABFMS's original aim was to enable the Nagas to read the Bible in their mother tongue, an aim they had to accomplish through the teaching of the Roman alphabet and in turn English. The use of English is further stressed by the ABFMS missionary George Supplee, while reporting on the Kohima Mission High School in 1940:

The fact that we have no common Naga vernacular makes it possible for us to stress the use of English. Our English Christian endeavour is a fine training ground for our young people, and their ease in conducting and speaking in these meetings is encouraging. Our daily English chapel service is also a Bible study course.¹⁷

The idea that print would initiate this 'imagined community' resonates with Benedict Anderson's (1991) work on this subject. Anderson argues that the standardization of print vernaculars in the 18th and 19th centuries enabled speakers of a variety of languages to think of other readers as fellow citizens. The implications are that the standardization of the vernacular in particular shaped 'an imagined political community' in Europe and subsequently, through the pirating of this model, all over the world. For nations to emerge as unitary, multilingualism must be reduced to create 'unified fields of communication' (Anderson 1991: 44). This assumption, however, is worth questioning.

Multilingualism is the norm in many parts of the world and not the exception (Gumperz 1982). In Nagaland alone, people often learn to speak 3-4 languages at any given time. Furthermore, contrary to the strong emphasis of the written word highlighted by Anderson, literacy and education were not an overnight event in the Naga hills, but a long and variable process that went hand in hand with orality and the performance of Christianity. For example, early Ao evangelists like I. Ben Wati recorded lengthy sermons and exegesis on the Bible on gramophone records, produced by Wheaton College in Illinois, USA. In the 1940s, these were circulated as 'soundscapes' in local church gatherings in the Ao area, providing sermons and biblical interpretations to the public. Some, I. Ben Wati told me, were even converted through this aural optic. Similarly, many of the early church meetings and preaching tours were based on the oral tradition of storytelling in the Naga areas. Although, by now, some could read, most of the population still relied on other senses – listening and speaking – to allow them to engage with the gospel. The work of the 'holy spirit' associated with revival meetings, particularly from the late 1940s, also relied much on the practice of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and prayer. Even the translation that the missionaries did with local assistance was based on aural and cultural attentiveness that would only later be transcribed into written form.¹⁸ As I have suggested, the focus on print and education brought about a certain energy to missionary and native interaction, but this must not simply be foregrounded at the expense of speaking and listening. What is clear so far is that the changes brought about by these interactions would mean that an 'imagined community' and the 'road to nationhood' would ensue. Indeed, as social theorists have argued, literacy and texts *themselves* are not agents to change society; it is humans who are the active voice behind these transformations (Schieffelin 2000; Street 1993).

The weight of Anderson's argument on the standardization of print to create 'unified fields of communication' is nevertheless useful in examining the establishment of schools, the use of English, and its relationship to Naga nationalism. Indeed, if we were to examine the Naga nationalist movement and its efforts for independence from India from around the 1940s onwards, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the backbone of this movement came from

these mission schools. A retired Naga National Council (NNC) General in Mokokchung provided an eloquent rendering of events, when I met him in 2014:

...the British had no plan, but the American plan was so clear for the Naga nation. The British were not keen on introducing English in the first Lower Primary School in Mokokchung, because they wanted to privilege Assamese. But the Americans introduced the Roman alphabet, and our course changed drastically. By learning the Roman alphabet, we gained education and could articulate our rights. Imagine that a class 8 educated Naga drafted the 1929 memorandum written to the Simon Commission that the Nagas are a distinct people.¹⁹ Till now, we can say that there is no fault in the English and was read even in the British parliament. How can a simple person from the Naga hills write such an eloquent and clear expression that convince the British parliament who said 'we must not convert the good Nagas or whatever they are into 'bad Hindus'. Thus, we were 'excluded' in the 1935 act and taken out of the Indian province.²⁰ The British were not always good to us, but here they were good. Through this act, we can say that we have been fortuitous to develop the NNC. The NNC thus became a church as it was first established in the Mission Compound of the American Baptists in Kohima and Impur.

In the General's comments, the language of English enters the political game of international power, linking the margins to the heart of the Empire. It also complements Anderson's idea of print creating a 'horizontal comradeship', as the bearer of national consciousness. That the British parliament could read the Simon Commission Memorandum and rule in favour of the Nagas – creating an 'excluded area' – was not an accident for the General. Indeed, for him, it was God's providence, through the ABFMS efforts, that enabled the first declaration of Naga national identity, which was, importantly, in English, thus demonstrating the power of education. The Simon Commission Memorandum would thus become the main text for Naga nationalism.²¹ The General's views, and the argument that I have been pursuing, would suggest that the work of the ABFMS and the administrative process installed by the British developed the relationship between education, governance and the fostering of a national identity, both in its temporal and cosmic sense.

Contesting Education: Americans and the British

Not all were convinced that mission education was the right path to development. Even later missionaries such as B.A. Anderson in 1945 commented

on the weak curriculum in Impur (Kiremwati 1995: 19). The curriculum generally remained undeveloped due to the short-term rationale of the missions to produce pastor-teachers and clerks to service government jobs. Narola Riverburg, daughter of the missionary Sidney Riverburg, writes how at the conclusion of the school term, the students were sent immediately to different villages to preach for several weeks, or to serve as pastors (Rivenburg 1941: 116). This strategy bore plenty of criticism from British officials, who saw the single-minded focus on Christianity as detrimental to the Nagas. This view would also be shared by some Nagas, for whom education itself was not always accepted wholesale. Many older Nagas recalled how education was viewed with suspicion and associated with 'lazy work' while agriculture was 'real work'. The British were also concerned that mission education was bringing about a 'western' form of lifestyle that was unsuitable for the Nagas. Administrative reports from 1884 and 1906 highlight the small gains made in education, with households resisting sending their children to schools because of agricultural priorities. Equally, those educated in these schools might refuse to 'bend their backs to manual labour', and would live for years on borrowed money so that they could secure a good government position and neglect the agricultural fields (Tanquist 1925: 141).

British officials, such as J.P. Mills, thought schools would 'denationalise' and bring about 'alien habits and ideas' (Mills 1925: 217-223). Indeed, George Supplee reports that because of the success of the mission schools, most of their students got government jobs, which brought about a monetary income with a desire for better clothes and homes. Supplee laments that Mills blamed the Americans for intoxicating native minds with their Western attitudes, but also says that Mills wanted to 'keep them [Nagas] as exhibits in a former state of civilization'.²² These incidents in some way illustrate the different kinds of approach that both parties – American and British – advocated. While the Americans considered the introduction of Christianity and education as a means of developing a civilisation, the British believed Christianity might destabilise this. In many accounts, there seems to be a litany of complaints against the British and in favour of the Americans (see Wati 2008: 317-335). There may have been a difficult relationship between the British and Americans, but it is

important to note that without the British administrative setup, mission activities would have largely been unsuccessful.

The presence of the British also meant that they could provide legal protection to areas under their suzerainty. Because warfare was discouraged under the new Christian ethos, the missionaries sought help from the British in banning practices such as 'headhunting' and slavery. The British presence also brought about a level of security to the missionaries, as they were under the protection of a 'Christian government' (Clark 1907: 126). The British facilitated major infrastructure projects such as roads that connected many Ao villages with the new Sub Divisional Headquarter in Mokokchung, which in turn linked it with Kohima, the capital, and other Naga areas, enabling the missionaries to access new areas and spread their Gospel.

While the British claimed interest in 'preserving' the Naga traditions, demanding, for example, that the Nagas wear traditional rather than western clothing, they accused the Americans of 'denationalising' the Nagas. Indeed, this divide would emerge from ABFMS strategy. Writing about the interactions during *The World Missionary Conference* in Edinburgh in 1910, the mission historian Brian Stanley (2009) argues that the Protestant missionary movement was highly internationalist in character, rather than nationalistic. Principles of social justice, conversion, education, and civilisation are internationalist and were ideas the ABFMS promulgated. The ABFMS strategy would thus inadvertently create a national consciousness that combined the providential, and internationalist, aspects of Christianity and the more 'temporal' and democratic aspects of what they saw as the 'American experiment in democracy' that was critical of hierarchical power and privileged the common folk (Downs 2010: 61). The point here is that the ABFMS ideas would manifest themselves in the Naga hills, primarily through education, influencing and shaping the people's worldview to bring about a nation, one that neither the Americans nor the British envisaged.

Education and national life

Both the Americans and the British were unsure of what the future of the Naga hills would be once they departed, though by the 1940s it was becoming

clearer that its future lay within India. As already mentioned, the British had in part seen the introduction of Christianity as a way of creating a separate administrative unit, segregating the 'hill' from the 'valley' populations. The anthropologist John Peel argues that coupled with the translation of the gospel, the association of one's nation with a world religion like Christianity brings about 'transcendental values' derived from an external, moral drive to nationhood, which is harder to obtain simply on the basis of cultural distinctiveness (Peel 2003: 281). The combination with religion then provided the stimulus for looking at 'nations' as distinct from other 'nations', based on shared religious belonging against the common enemy: in this case, the rise of the Scots, Welsh, and English nations based on Protestantism against the recalcitrant catholic Irish within and the French without (Peel 2003: 281-82). Here I argue that the education system, along with Christianity, was the prime instigator of how the Naga nation gravitated towards a shared identity of Christianity against 'the other'. I am suggesting that the efforts of both the British and Americans contributed to the establishment of a distinct Naga national identity against a Hindu/Indian one, a feature that became more entrenched after the formation of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980 (see Lintner 1990; Freston 2001).

The connection between missionary education and Naga nationalism is further emphasised by the missionary Robert Delano in 1953, six years after the Naga hills called for independence from India:

Some of the people who are active in the independence movement are also leaders in our Christian work. This is particularly true of our Sema Tribe, which has few educated leaders. Since government has started taking firm measures against these people it has become impossible to use them in positions of leadership for the Christian program.²³

Delano's comment raises an important question about the American Baptists' involvement in the Naga nationalist struggle. One must bear in mind that there were strong stipulations for missionaries by their respective Home Boards against participating in politics, partly not to upset indigenous governments, but also to abstain on matters of politics that might jeopardise missionary activities (Stanley 2009: 260-64). While the ABFMS officially maintained a stance of 'neutrality' in matters dealing with the political rise of the Naga National Council

(NNC), they were accused by the Indian government of sympathising with the 'rebels' and thus expelled in 1955; an expulsion based on a shared Christian identity, which, for the Indian government, amounted to collusion. The missionaries were even accused of spying for the American government and serving India's Pakistani enemies (Anderson n.d: 74).

The ABFMS were aware of the difficult context post-World War II, at the cusp of Indian independence, which also brought to the surface the Nagas' own demand for independence. In a candid reflection on this dilemma one of the last ABFMS missionaries B.I. Anderson writes in 1945:

As we missionaries saw the dangers of this new movement [for Naga independence] becoming too radical we cautioned the people, urging them to move slowly and within the framework of the new government. But the day had also dawned when the younger churches were given more self determination and the organizational changes in the Mission gave the national leaders more prominence and greater power (Anderson n.d.: 68).

The seeds had been planted. The work of the ABFMS would cease in the Naga hills, but their legacy and their influence would continue to have an effect on the region and the people, leading to a fully fledged struggle for independence. The principles of the ABFMS policies on education articulated first in 1853 ring prophetic now. B.I. Anderson's reflection highlights the impact education and mission had on the Nagas, an acknowledgement that now it was completely out of the ABFMS's hands and firmly in the destiny of their indigenous converts.

This point is significant in the postcolonial development of Naga nationalism, as evident in A.Z. Phizo's reflection on education and the Christian faith. One could further argue that the adoption of a common script – the Roman alphabet – and the adoption of Christianity accentuated a pan-Naga identity that is increasingly related to territoriality and religion. The slogan 'Nagaland for Christ' adopted by different nationalist groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) from the 1970s onwards, alongside the Naga Baptist churches, suggests that the activities of the ABFMS reverberate into contemporary Naga nationalism. In fact, there is even a move by different nationalist and church groups to finish the work of the ABFMS and extend the influence of Christianity beyond the Naga areas and into China and Southeast

Asia – a move that began with the launching of the Nagaland Missionary Movement in 1970 (Longkumer 2018). This demonstrates that the work of nationalism and its intimate connection to Christianity continues to pervade the region, especially with the growing influence of Hindu nationalism (Longkumer 2017).

Conclusion

The first aim of this paper has been to document and interpret the developing position of American Baptists in the Naga hills in Northeast India, and how their use of education and print developed a new national consciousness in the region. The spread of Christianity in Northeast India has been unparalleled in comparison to other parts of India. The region's geographic isolation has meant that Christianity has been able to contribute to a crucial difference, a distinct identity from the Indic and Buddhist civilisations that surround it. I have made some key overtures towards the idea that Christianity and Naga nationalism are intertwined. The missionary work in the Naga hills and Northeast India was partly geared towards taming the 'unruly' inhabitants by bringing 'enlightenment' and 'civilisation'. Not only did conversion to Christianity signal this shift, both for the missionaries and for the indigenous peoples, but it also aided in equipping the people with tools and resources such as mission education and schools. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that evangelical progress was very slow, as indicated by the number of Christians in the region in 1894. While this lack of success demoralised the missionaries, it is significant more broadly as it meant that their efforts had to be revitalised and shifted to a focus on education.

Second, I have demonstrated that the work of the ABFMS was aided by the adoption of a Roman script and an emphasis on English. In the Naga hills in particular, this would be central in the translation, education and dissemination of print among the people. It is in this context that the discussion of Benedict Anderson's work is useful. But my analysis departs from Anderson in two significant ways. First, it is true that the translation of the Bible, and different Christian literatures and hymns from English to the local vernaculars brought about a gradual sense of cultural unity amongst the readers and the local

community. However, it was not solely print or indeed the Bible that mediated this; other forms like orality, the performance of Christianity through aural mechanisms, 'secular' education, and the influence of British administration played a role. Second, and more importantly, the key to this enterprise was the adoption of the Roman script, and not the dependence on a unitary vernacular. The script unified the linguistic landscape in terms of its mutual and strategic practicalities, but it did not obliterate local vernaculars in the case of the polyglot Nagas. However, I agree that Anderson's idea of creating 'unified fields of communication' was useful for the NNC's activities; English became significant but not at the cost of other languages.

While schools had the primary aim of evangelism for the missions, they also provided a 'secular' service for the government, in that they created a class of formally educated Nagas, therefore resourcing the mechanism of colonial bureaucracy. This meant that the influence of mission education would give rise to a Christian 'tribal elite' who would one day dominate the social and political landscape (Downs 1983: 76). Indeed, according to a prominent Naga educationalist, Mayangnokcha, when the Clarks started teaching in Molung village in 1877 the only available medium was 'gesture language and direct presentation of objects' (cited in Philip 1976: 209). Now, he continues, all tribes in Nagaland can read and write in their own languages (Philip 1976: 209).

Finally, Bible reading and the teaching of English were related in the Naga hills. English, based on the Romanised script, had to be taught to the Nagas to enable them to read the Bible for themselves in the true Baptist spirit. Gradually, though, English would be used to crystallise a 'community' post-independence that constructed a difference against 'Hindi', a debate that continues to intrigue and polarise opinions (see Kikon 2003). In present day Nagaland, the 'community' established through English and education continues to be acknowledged and celebrated.

On the 10th January 2018, a large gathering comprising of Nagas from all walks of life – intellectuals, nationalists, students, peace activists, civil society, and church

organisations – celebrated ‘Naga Day’. Conceived under the slogan – ‘A day where all Nagas come & stand together as one people’ – it was an opportunity ‘To remember, celebrate, embrace, and uphold the spirit of the Naga Memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission on January 10, 1929’.²⁴ This celebration in 2018 demonstrates the continuing significance of the first articulation of Naga sovereignty written *in English* that is central to the way the Naga nation is conceptualized – the link between print and nationalism through the writing of the Simon Commission Memorandum – a point also acknowledged earlier by the NNC General. The Memorandum says ‘...we should not be thrust to the mercy of other people...but to leave us alone to determine ourselves as in ancient times’ (quoted in Franke 2009: 39). It is important to note that the person who wrote the Simon Commission Memorandum was a schoolteacher – Rūzhūkhrie Angami.²⁵ He would have been a beneficiary of schools influenced by the American Baptists. Crafting the document through the vision of Rūzhūkhrie Angami and others has become a momentous event, precisely because it is in print and in the medium of English, both first introduced by the American Baptists. This iconic evidence is again indicative of the key argument in this paper: that education and print are significant contributors to the way people gradually shape their ‘nation’, and in this regard Christianity played and plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the Naga people in the Indian republic.

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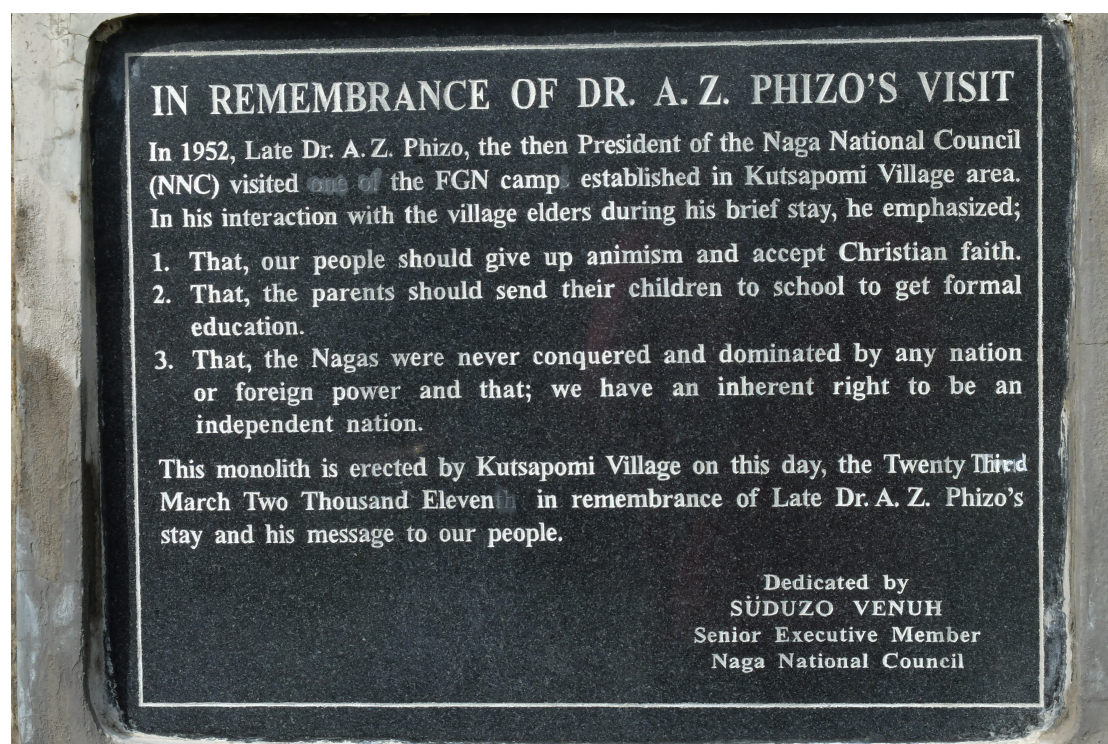
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Image 1: Kutsapomi village in Southern Nagaland, Author's copy.



¹ Three recent works contributing to the field have been published though not on education (see May 2012; Pachau 2014; Thomas 2016).

² It was called the Naga hills by the British in 1866 and officially Naga Hills District in 1890 (Lotha 2007), and remained so until 1963 when it was under the administrative jurisdiction of Assam. Therefore, it is important to note that in some instances when the missionaries speak of Assam, it also includes the Naga hills.

³ The time period covered is because 1871 marks the date when Godhula Rufus Brown, an Assamese evangelist for the ABFMS entered the Naga hills and 1955 is when the last missionaries were asked to leave the Naga hills by the government of India due to alleged involvement with the Naga National Movement.

⁴ Scott and Francis Jenkins were both devout evangelical Christians. Scott studied under William Carey at the Fort William College in Calcutta while Jenkins was the son of an English clergyman (Downs 1983: 24-25).

⁵ David Kling suggests that the basis of American foreign missions during the 18th and 19th century has its roots in the American evangelical movement, related to the Second

Great Awakening (c. 1790-1835) in America. It gave rise to the notion of 'New Divinity', comprising of four main elements (i) conversionism – the necessity of a new birth; (ii) activism – emphasis on religious duties and social involvement; (iii) biblicism – the centrality of the Bible as religious authority; (iv) and crucicentrism – a focus on the redeeming work of Christ (Kling 2001: 17).

⁶ FM348 (Supplee) American Baptist Historical Society Archives (ABHSA).

⁷ MF 58 Nathan Brown, ABHSA.

⁸ Personal communication with Frederick Downs, May 11th 2015. The work by Christopher King (1994) with regard to the formation of the Hindi/Urdu script and the nexus between colonial government patronage and language use in the 19th century warrants a brief comparative mention. Unconvinced that both Hindus and Muslims wrote in a script that was derived from Perso-Arabic, and to find a simple administrative language that was not overtly literary, the colonial government instigated the separation of a single language 'Hindustani' into two categories of Urdu and Hindi on the basis of script and vocabulary. This distinction eventually extended to religion and community differences between Muslims and Hindus, effectively falling into Hindu nationalist agendas of marking Urdu as foreign and Hindi as indigenous. Likewise, one can suggest that although the adoption of the Roman script was a practical one for the ABFMS in the case of the Nagas, it eventually led to a distinction between Hindi and English not simply as two language systems, but accentuated nationalistic and civilizational differences too especially in the postcolonial situation (see also Kikon 2003).

⁹ Between 1877-1885, Clark also contemplated using the Assamese script but finally decided on the Roman script, the reasons for this are unclear (Bendangyabang 2004: 99). To accomplish this task of translating and distributing the materials, Clark brought a hand printing press in 1880 from Amguri (Assam), taking two days for the whole of Molungyimsen village to bring it up (Clark 1907: 108).

¹⁰ For example, a standardized *Chongli* Ao was adopted as the common language amongst the Ao Naga, promoted through primary schools, church services and hymns, and marginalised other dialects.

¹¹ FM348 (Supplee), ABHSA.

¹² ABFMS, 109th Annual Report, 1923, p.115.

¹³ FM 348 Supplee, ABHSA.

¹⁴ MF 395 Truxton, ABHSA.

¹⁵ FM 259, ABHSA.

¹⁶ The teaching of Assamese and Hindi did continue on a small scale during this time in the Naga hills to help the Nagas to read Assamese when they went to Jorhat, in the plains of Assam (Thomas 2016: 40).

¹⁷ FM 348 Supplee, ABHSA.

¹⁸ These translations were not always agreed upon and sometimes caused tension between the missionaries and the native Christians. For instance, George Supplee, accuses his senior colleague, Joe Tanquist, of being an 'editor' and not a 'translator' which Supplee bestows on a local Angami Naga for translating the New Testament (FM 348 Supplee, ABHSA).

¹⁹ The person who wrote the Memorandum was a schoolteacher, Rüzühkhrie Angami.

²⁰ The Simon Commission was constituted to look into reforms which resulted in the government of India Act of 1935. When the Commission visited Kohima in 1929, the District Commissioner, J.H. Hutton, provided the document written by the Nagas expressing their independence upon the British leaving India. This document is the first articulation of Naga national identity. The memorandum was fiercely debated in the British parliament in 1935 and the Naga hills was subsequently 'excluded' in 1937 to

'protect' the Nagas from outside cultural and political incursion. For a fuller discussion on this see Franke 2009: 38-42.

²¹ I provide a brief abstract: '...we pray that the British Government will continue to safeguard our rights against all encroachment from other people who are more advanced than us by withdrawing our country that we should not be thrust to the mercy of other people who could never be subjected; but to leave us alone to determine ourselves as in ancient times' (Franke 2009: 39).

²² FM 348 Supplee, ABHSA.

²³ FM 376 Delano ABHSA.

²⁴ "'Naga Day" Book', *Naga Republic*, accessed 1st February 2018, <http://www.thenagarepublic.com/discourse/second-edition-naga-day-book-original-copy-simon-commission/>,

²⁵ 'Naga Club recalls representation to Simon Commission on Jan 10 1929', *Naga Republic*, accessed 1st February 2018, <http://www.thenagarepublic.com/files/naga-club-recalls-representation-simon-commission-jan-10-1929/>